DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 226 864 PS 013 409

AUTHOR Allen, K. Eileen
TITLE The First Days of School: Helping Young Children Adapt to Their First Group Experience.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); Early Childhood Education; *Educational Environment; *Individual Needs; Learning Experience; *Parent Participation; *Teacher Role; *Young Children

ABSTRACT

Initial adaptation to the preschool or day care program is essential to the child's ultimate ability to make maximum use of the learning experiences made available each day. A well-planned initial visit (in which interest in coming back to school and a beginning rapport is established) followed by a carefully timed and individualized adaptation period over the first week or two of school enables most children to adapt readily to this new experience. Helping parents be a part of this process, thus providing the child with some "known" elements in the new environment, is another important component in the child's learning to adjust to the school situation. Finally, making sure that the child comes to perceive the teacher as the source of many "good" things as well as a source of consistently held limits allows a child to develop a sense of trust and security in this very new environment, in which expectations are often quite different from those the child has encountered before. (MP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED226864

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy

THE FIRST DAYS OF SCHOOL:

HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN ADAPT TO THEIR FIRST GROUP EXPERIENCE

K. Eileen Allen

Professor of Human Development

1982

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Eileen Allen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS013409

Introduction

The initial adaptation to the preschool or daycare program is a critical learning experience for children, one that teachers need to plan carefully and in detail. A young child, confronting preschool or daycare for the first time is expected to learn very quickly a whole new set of developmental skills -- separating from parents, following very different routines from those in the home, sharing adults with many children rather than a few, eating and toileting under unfamiliar circumstances. If teachers, following a Piagetian lead, will arrange the environment in such a way that familiar home-like elements are maintained while the child is adapting to the requirements and challenges of the new setting, the experience is likely to be a positive one. As Hunt (1960) would say, of a comfortable adaption, "a good match" had been made for the child between familiar and unfamiliar elements in the setting. Each child's introduction to the program needs to be managed with understanding, reassurance, and support from teachers. Individualization is important; young children differ markedly one from the other, in the ways they respond to this new school experience. On the other hand, all children, regardless of their initial manner of entering the classroom, have similar needs. Foremost among these is a sense of comfort and security - one cannot exist without the other. Thus teachers must help children to perceive the classroom and the play yard as a place where teachers can be trusted to keep each child safe and protected from whatever eventuality a particular child might be apprehensive about.

Thus, the manner in which teachers arrange for children to take this first major step away from home and have it result in a positive learning experience for each child is of utmost importance. This chapter will explore the optimum arrangement for the child's entrance into a school program. There is full recognition however that today's society, with its many single parent families

or families where both mother and father are in the work force, adaptions as described in chapter may be necessary.

Before School Begins

Getting acquainted with the child and the parent before the child's actual entry into the school program yields rich dividends for all. In earlier years, a home visit was often recommended as a first step in the introductory process. Certainly, getting familiar with a total stranger such as a teacher-to-be in the safety of the child's own home and family did perhaps have merit. As the child put the first step over the classroom threshhold it helped perhaps if the child could pick out that somewhat familiar face. However, the home visit did little to prepare the child for the newness of the classroom itself and may even have confused the child about the actual role of the teacher. Little concrete evidence exists as to how functional the home visit was in the child's adjustment to the school setting; today such an introductory step seldom is seen as feasible except in relatively few instances. For the most part other ways must be found for the child and the parents to get acquainted with the preschool setting and with the teachers. Oftentimes parents may be as apprehensive as the child, especially if this is their first experience with letting their child go to preschool or daycare.

The Initial Visit

The ideal arrangement is to plan an initial visit for child and parents at a time when the class is not in session. To insure the success of this initial visit, a first responsibility of teachers toward helping children to have a positive response to coming to school is to arrange the classroom setting so that it is attractive, appealing, and reassuring. In other words the classroom for the initial visit should look as it does each school morning - ready for children. The furniture and equipment should be arranged in a way that invites children to participate; the shelves and play materials orderly and tempting; the tables set with children's activities such as crayons, puzzles, books and are not piled high with teachers papers, books, and materials in various

stages of preparation. In addition, teachers need to have cut out in advance an assortment of small attractive pictures. There should be five or six more than the number of children expected to enroll so that even the last child who comes for an initial visit can have several appealing pictures from which to make a selection. These pictures are for pasting in children's lockers as a means for personal identification. Children's names should also be printed in large letters on tag board or construction paper strips. These too can be glued in the child's locker along with the selected picture. (How the locker routine is conducted will be described in a subsequent section.) In preparing for the initial visit, teachers also need to become familiar with the child's name (and the parents) and have learned to pronounce them correctly.

Hopefully, the enrollment forms and social health history have been sent out and returned prior to the initial visit. By so doing, teachers hvae some clues as to the child's and the parents likes, dislikes, and expectations; as well as areas of special need. If the materials are not available in advance, the teacher who makes the appointment with the parent should plan to make some initial inquiries that will serve as a starting point for establishing a comfortable interchange. The enrollment packet, to be most useful, should contain a brief overview of the program and some guidelines concerning school policies such as health measures, safety,and expectations for children's dress - play clothes, sturdy shoes for climbing, a box of extra clothing (worn or nearly outgrown) for emergency. Thus parents arrive knowing a bit about what to expect or what to question. Valuable time does not have to be devoted to review of each of the multitude of every day details.

Getting Acquainted

In actually conducting the initial visit, all members of the teaching staff should be on hand. Assuming two teachers, one teacher can start the visit by chatting with the parents; the other teacher can sit companionably

near until the child is ready to go exploring. From the moment the family enters the classroom it needs to be evident to the child that this is a place where the primary interest is the child and his or her well-being. Thus, teachers remember the child's name and use it welcomingly as the family comes through the door - "Hello, you must be David! And this must be your mother and father. Do come in." The initial meeting should take place around one of the children's tables in the classroom. This brings the adults - familiar and unfamiliar - into the child's visual and auditory range. Such a seemingly trivial detail may be extremely important; one of the first things a child often wonders about is how are these adults, so important in my life, going to interact with each other? Will they like each other? What will they say about me?

It is important that the child not feel left out of the conversation; yet equally important, not to focus so much attention that the child feels uncomfortable. Simple comments about obvious and familiar things - "You wore your running shoes when you came to visit school today" mixed with related comments to parents: "David is a sturdy boy. He must play outdoors a lot" is a positive way to open the door for feedback from either the parents, or the child, or both. The child may say that he can fun faster than his brother or the parent may remark on how David plays outdoors from morning 'til night. In either event, pursuing topics such as these gives both parents and child the message that the teacher has a sincere interest in things of importance to them.

Occasionally such a remark may "backfire" causing the parent to launch into a negative recital regarding, perhaps the child's "obstinancy" about going outdoors to play. Should this happen, the teacher needs to change the subject as soon as possible and find a topic that the parent can respond to positively, or in a more neutral fashion. Throughout this early part of the initial visit, the second teacher is participating in the conversation and watching at the same time for the first signs that the child is ready to move off to explore the room. Usually the child indicates this readiness by losing interest

in the conversation; eyeing the play materials on shelves or tables; or pointing out to the parent things of interest about the room. These are cues for the teacher to help the child move away from the table while offering appropriate reassurances: that the parent will stay right there, but in a few minutes will come and look at the toys with the child.

Inspecting the Classroom

Some children do not move out on the first few cues, a perfectly acceptable response. It is important however, that the parent not aggravate the situation by recounting stories in the child's presence about how shy the child is, or what difficulty there has been in leaving the child with babysitters or at church school. A gentle interruption on the part of the teacher, audible to the child - "We'll help David to get used to school; he'll get so he likes to come," stops the focus on the negative. It also allows for a fresh tack - "Let's all go and look at the trucks (or the dolls, or the puzzles)." As the group reaches the area the teacher assigned to be with the child gets down to child level while the other teacher and parent stand and watch, chatting about related things such as children's fun with the school trucks. Once the child is engaged with an activity, (this may not occur until the second or third interest center has been toured) the first teacher can say to the child, "Your mother and I are going to go right over there and sit down while you are playing with the dough." This is a cue for the teacher assigned to the child to help the child stay focussed on the activity by commenting reassuringly about what fun the child is having in the activity, or by offering the child an intriguing extension "Look, a cookie cutter shaped like a heart and one shaped like a kitty." As the child becomes comfortable, teacher and child can soon begin to tour the classroom, stopping to play or talk wherever the child lingers, shows interest or seems doubtful.

The role of the teacher is to help the child learn about the school environment; thus, comments are simple and though seemingly self-evident (at least to adults), they can be most reassuring to the child. "These are the

blocks. Children get to play with them everyday. Here's the bathroom. It has toilets and wash basins and a mirror. Can you see yourself? This is where we keep the books. You can get a book to look at almost any time you want to." The teacher must be careful, however, not to overwhelm the child nor to pressure the child with quantities of questions and comments. Instead the teacher is quietly companionable and responsive to the child's questions (both unverbalized and verbalized), and to the child's displays of interest and curiosity, reluctance or timidity. All such child clues provide valuable information for planning the child's initial days in the school setting.

During the tour of the classroom, some children may need to return periodically to touch base with the parent, or they may want the parent to come and see something of interest. Such interactions should be encouraged; the child must not be denied access to parents. At the same time, "touch backs" should be kept brief so that the child has many opportunities to move independently of parents. Such practice in moving independently is necessary if the child is to separate comfortably and confidently during the early days of school. For the child who seldom casts a glance in the parents direction, so engrossed is he or she in the play activities, it may be well to cue the child to take a toy over to show the parent or to ask the child to invite the parent to see for example, the play yard. Prompting such child-parent interactions is important if they do not occur spontaneously. Teachers need some idea of how the child relates to familiar adults as well as to strangers if they are to plan wisely for the child's first days of school.

The Reluctant Child

The other extreme, of course, is the child who has great difficulty being separated from the parent and the adult conversation group; a child who may even cling physically to the parent, refusing all overtures of the second teacher. Several approaches may be necessary. One is for the teacher to bring a particularly attractive toy to the area; often such a toy will hold an irresistable

attraction for the child who may soon begin to play with it, at least tentatively. The caution here is for the teacher not too move in so rapidly that the child retreats. Also, the parent should be helped to neither coax nor attempt to cajole the child into playing with the toy. Neither should the parent except on rare occasions play with the toy with the child, this defeats the underlying purpose which is to help children learn that teachers are to help children have a good time at school with the attractive school toys; home is where parents help children to have a good time with the home toys. If the child still does not disengage from the parent it may be necessary for the one teacher to stand up with the parent and continue the adult conversation while the other teacher stays down at the child's level. A final step may be for the teacher and parent to move over to first one and then another of the play centers, handling materials and talking about activities in each of the areas. The child is sure to follow and the other teacher follows too, offering toys for the child too, to handle, as each center is visited. Though a real separation from the parent has not been achieved in this approach, at least the child has visited each area of the classroom and play yard and has glimpsed the possibilities of each through observation and overhearing the talk between the parent and the teacher about the materials.

Talking with Parents

Assuming, however, the child and a teacher do get busily engaged in an activity within a reasonable lengthof time; the other teacher and the parent can begin to discuss the child in terms of various developmental issues: eating, sleeping, play habits, and the child's special interests and favorite play materials. This is the time to talk about the parents' anticipation of how the child will handle the separation when the time comes to actually start school. This part of the initial meeting is also given over to discussing the underlying philosophy of the program, the daily schedule, and the parents' expectations as related to their child's participation in the class. This is also a good time for the teacher to mention nice traits that she has noticed

or is noticing about the child: "For a young three year old, David is really good at working puzzles. Look at the way he's putting that difficult puzzle together." Such casual observations made by the teacher assures parents that the teacher really sees and appreciates their child. Usually this is a giant step toward establishing the rapport that will help parents to comfortably leave their child in the teacher's care.

The initial visit may also be a time to explain the mechanics of enrollment and to go over the paperwork - such things as medical forms, permission forms, and emergency cards. Hopefully, not too much of the valuable get-acquainted time is devoted to mechanics, however. One way to get around this is to mail the registration packet to the family in advance of the initial visit. That way, minimum time need be given over to paperwork - and then only to help parents with any items which they question. In those instances where the English-speaking skills of the family are limited or the literacy level is marginal, unobtrusive special help needs to be provided.

Ending the Initial Visit

Of particular importance before ending the adult conversation is to make sure parents understand the schedule for the first few days of school. As will be discussed later, the daily schedule for the opening days may be quite different from what eventually will be regular school sessions. It is well, too that the initial visit not last too long - 45 minutes is probably an optimum time. By keeping the visit short, it usually ensures that it will end on a positive "looking-forward" kind of a note. One very nice way is for the teacher and parent to go over and watch the child play for a few moments and then to warn the child that soon it will be time to go home. Within a few minutes the child can be brought back to the conference table and helped to select a picture to paste in a cubby, locker or above a hook space. The locker is selected by either the child or the teacher, depending upon the situation as there may be occasions (a handicapped child or a very shy child) when the teachers want the locker in a

particular location in the child's best interest. Together the teacher and child can paste the picture in a designated space with a nicely lettered card (again, prepared in advance) with the child's name on it pasted above or below the picture. The teacher explains that this is the child's very own place. The picture and the locker will be there waiting when the child comes back to school the next time. Such a simple procedure provides something "known" and personal for the child to look forward to upon returning and lets the child know concretely that teachers do in fact provide for the child.

Departure time may also be a good time to talk briefly about the other children who will be coming to school. This can be done by pointing out other lockers with pictures on them and reading the child's name who belongs to each of several lockers. That there will be many children in the classroom the next time the child comes to school is important to convey so that the child understands that things will be different when he or she returns. Such an interaction is a pleasant way to end the visit, expecially when accompanied by the teachers assurance as they say goodbye that they are looking forward to seeing the child again very soon.

As noted earlier, it is important to end the visit while the child or children are having a good time. Frequently, there are children who do not want to leave; oftentimes they are just getting warmed up. This augurs well for the first day of school for it gives the child a much wanted experience to look foward to.returning. The teacher, however, not the parent, determines the time of leave taking: "Sara, I know you are having a good time with the blocks but it is time to go home now. You can play with the blocks a long time when you come back."

Though teachers do take the lead and do follow through at departure time, they do not for the most part enforce other classroom rules on the first visit. Instead the parent and the teacher together work through any problem that might arise. By such "pairing" of authority the child learns more readily that teachers and parents play many of the same roles.

Near the close of the initial visit the occasional parent may need to be advised that further visits are quite likely to be necessary before their child is ready to stay at school without parents. The teacher describes how it is determined that a child is ready to stay without a parent: when the child can move away from the parent for brief periods to play with a favorite material; can respond to and accept the help and support of at least one member of the teaching staff.

Alternate Procedures

Another option for the initial visit is to see three or at the most, four children and their parents at the same time. When implementing this approach it is important to select the group carefully so that each child's initial exposure to other children is a favorable one. In settings that follow a vertical or family grouping pattern, it is probably well not to mix the youngest and the oldest children at this time and to balance somewhat the number of boys and girls. Here again, it is the qusetion of making a comfortable match, initially. A five year old boy who has been encouraged to be rough and tumble might be quite confused of confronted only with girls or "infants" on his initial visit. Selection of children for small visiting groups may also be done on the basis of children who live and play in the same neighborhood. This provides yet another bridge between hoom and school for a child's first school experience. An introductory visit of this type follows much the same format as was described above.

Staff Discussion

It is well for teachers to spend a few minutes making notes, discussing the initial visit, and exchanging impressions regarding the level of the child's developmental skills and play preferences in terms of various behaviors observed: "Once David started talking there was no stopping him." "He didn't seem to realize that the book he was looking at was upside down." "He put that 10 piece puzzle together faster than many four year olds can do it." "David got really 'hooked' on the play dough." It is time, too, to share information gleaned from conversation

with the parent and from observing the parent's interactions with the child. All of this information can then be put together to develop a plan for making the first day of school optimally comfortable and appealing to the child. The notes and plans should be set down in writing and put into the child's classroom folder along with any special instructions or requests the parent may have made related to such things as the child's health, food, toileting or special needs.

The First Days of School

During the initial visit it is important, as was alluded to earlier, that teachers explain to parents that the schedule for the first few days of school will be quite different from the regular daily schedule. Let us turn now to look at these differences.

Staggered Scheduling

The first few school days (perhaps even into the second week for some very young or more timid children) should be shorter daily sessions, lengthened gradually as children become comfortable in the classroom setting. There should also be a scheduled staggering of entries in which not all children start on the first day of school. This makes it easier for new children who then do not have to cope with an overwhelming number of other new children all at once. Also, by starting with a smaller group, each child can have a choice of preferred materials (learning to share comes later) and can have as much teacher attention as is needed to feel comfortable and secure.

Parents need to plan to stay for a few minutes (or longer, if necessary) on the first few days of school. Even those parents who feel their child does not need them to stay or does not want them to stay are nevertheless encouraged to be available. Finally, parents are asked to delay carpooling (even bussing, if possible unless the parent can ride, too) so that the child is free to concentrate on just one adaptation at a time - that of the school setting. It may be necessary for teachers to explain to parents that carpooling requires an entirely different and perhaps more anxiety provoking set of skills than does

adaptation to a school setting where facilitative teachers are planning each step to minimize undue stress for the child. Premature carpooling for some children may interfere markedly with their adaptation to school and may be misconstrued as dislike of school when actually the problems are associated with carpooling.

One way to hasten the adaptation process so that all children may be started as near the beginning of the school year as possible is to split the daily session into two "mini" sessions. Thus teachers are running duplicate programs for a few days that are ideal in that they are short and comprised of fewer children. Within a very few days the two groups can be melded, although the first day of all children together should probably be shorter than the eventual full daily schedule. Another idea that has proven helpful is to start the experienced children first and gradually work in the new children. This tactic can be coupled with the split session just described with a few of the experienced children coming each session. Their confidence and "know how" serve as good models for the new, less confident children. The experienced children also provide the newer children with good examples of the appropriate use of equipment and materials, and interactions with children. These events teachers can comment upon approvingly; "Jerry, you remembered to take the legos apart before you put them back in the basket." "Rosa, you found a mat to sit on. Good for you." "Sonya, you hung up your paint apron when you were finished," thus, cueing new children as to what is expected.

Teachers' Goals

The teachers basic goal during the first several days of school is to facilitate to the maximum extent possible children's adaptation to the program. to each other, and to the teachers. All day long children are informed that they are doing well as they go about doing the expected or "right" thing.

In other words, teachers, out loud, approve what may seem to be the obvious. They do this during routines and transition, remarking when children put the paper towels in the trash basket, hang their coats or sweaters in the appropriate locker, find a mat to sit upon at music. The same kind of approving statements are made when children use materials according to expectations: the teachers mention that one child remembered to put on a paint apron; that another child returned a completed puzzle to the shelf before selecting a second; that children are remembering to keep trucks in the carpeted area. Approving remarks, too, are made about appropriate social interactions with children and with teachers: waiting for a turn with the rolling pin: helping another child pick up a basket of spilled parquetry blocks: asking the teacher for help as needed. Throughout the session, teachers are giving this kind of positive feedback so that children, from the very beginning, feel competent and confident about themselves in this new situation. They do not have to try to find out through sometimes painful trial and error what is expected of them nor do they have to wonder whether teachers notice them or like them. The friendly, quiet, personal manner in which teachers give an approving feedback about specifics lets each child know that he or she is doing a fine job.

Necessary Rules

While most of the expectations and rules can be imparted individually and somewhat indirectly, as just described, certain general rules do need to be stated as children use areas the first few times. For example, it is important to tell and show children how and where to start their block structures well away from the shelves. What the teachers have in mind, of course, is that all builders have access to the block supply without knocking down each others creations. Thus the rule is stated at the outset so that children from the start can get off on a good footing with each other. The same holds true where other rules are concerned: a paint brush for each color so the paints do not get muddied for other users (and, the teachers' hidden agenda, to prevent the waste

of so expensive a material), only three children at a time on top of the ladder box in order to prevent the crowding, jostling and the inevitable accident if more than three inexperienced children are on top at the same time.

More specific rules can be given as the occasion arises; these may need to be stated in more than one way for some children. A child in the block area may continue to throw blocks, even after the teacher has stated clearly and directly to the child: "Blocks are for building." A second transgression of a potentially hazardous nature calls for a specific statement, "I cannot let you throw blocks." A third repeat calls for removal from the block area, a topic to be discussed in Chapter under the heading of discipline. The point here is that necessary rules are in place and enforced, gently but firmly, right from the start. When teachers hold to the stated limits, timid and less confident children know that teachers can be trusted to protect them and look out for their general well-being. The transgressor too, is helped: indeed, there are limits and teachers do maintain them. Such knowledge is most helpful to children who may have been inconsistently managed prior to their entry into the school program.

While children are learning the rules, even a minor over-stepping (which later may be conveniently ignored) is not overlooked. Learning the rules well in the beginning lays the foundation for true freedom later in the program. Four or five children engaged in a game of their own making on top of the ladder box toward the end of spring session is not nearly as likely to result in accident; the children are now more skilled in such motor activities and also have internalized many "rules" that help them to exercise care and concern for others.

Teacher Approval

Thus, during the early days and weeks of school, the teacher focuses almost exclusively on letting each child know, many times a day, how appropriate his or her behaviors is. The teacher does this, as we have indicated, by giving each child a great deal of warm, positive attention, at times when the child is

appropriately engaged. Such an approach helps children learn what is expected of them at school, and it establishes, for children, that teachers and teacher attention function in the school setting as parents and parents' attention functions in the home setting. The latter point is most important in that young children are highly dependent on the significant adults in their lives for every aspect of their care and comfort; to make the school experience successful children must see teachers as being the source of good and needed things at school just as parents are such a resource on the home scene.

Getting to Know Each Other

Another major goal of teachers during the adaptation days is to help children get to know each other. One way is by using children's names all day long - on the play yard, during snack time, free play, small group activities, transition and music times. It is perfectly permissible to point so that children know exactly whom the teacher is talking about: "Sara, you have on a red sweater and so does Tim." "Marty is coloring and so is Julie," "Sally and Amy are both washing their hands." There are innumerable other ways, too, that names can be used throughout the day:

- During the early days and weeks, conversation at snack time should include much talk about names.
- Name guessing games (where the answer is obvious) can be played at preacademics. "I am thinking of someone who is wearing a yellow tee-shirt with a big red apple on it. Yes, it is Christan. Let's all say 'Christian'."
- Music time provides innumerable opportunities for using name songs, and improvising name games on many of the old favorites. example, the Paw Paw Patch tune to improvise, "Where oh where is Billy? - Where oh where is Linda?"
- While writing a child's name on a painting, the teacher can read the name aloud.

- Out-of-doors, chants can be used as children jump, slide and climb. "Here comes John, here comes Mauri, here comes Jill."
- When teachers give directions, instead of saying, "Sit over there" the teacher can point and say, "Find a place to sit next to Matthew."
- As children begin to know each others name, there can be games where children name the child who is sitting next to them or where one child names another and then changes places in the circle.

At the same time teachers frequently should be telling children their own names and helping children to use teachers names appropriately. For young children, a great sense of security comes from knowing that others know your name and call you by it; and a great sense of social confidence comes from knowing the names of other children and the names of teachers. The importance of learning names is taken so for granted in the adult's community yet this helpful amenity is so often neglected in helping young children adapt to new social settings.

Explaining Differences

Another way that teachers can help children to adjust to the school situation is by interpreting children's behavior to each other. Young children often become concerned when they see other children crying, swearing, refusing to come to snack. They are in a state of complete egocentrisim as Piaget calls it - whatever is happening to another child is likely to happen to them seems to be the general trend of a young child's reasoning. Thus, the teacher may need to explain that Mary isn't really hurt - "she's crying because she didn't want to give up the tricycle"; that David will learn not to call children bad names after he's been at school awhile; and "when Betty gets to know us all better she will come to snack."

In actuality, many such questions are unasked verbally; teachers must be attuned to children's looks of inquiry or distress. In this age of mainstreaming where both physically handicapped and behaviorally troubled children may be enrolled in a classroom, such watchfulness on the part of the teacher is especially necessary. Oftentimes

young children feel that a similar calamity may befall them. Teachers need to explain perhaps that "Jill wasn't born with strong straight legs like yours - that's why she wears a brace - so she can walk, too." For children with physically aggressive behaviors that distress the other children, teachers must exercise the utmost care in anticipating problems and preventing their occurrence if at all possible. One way is to be continuously alert to a potential conflict situation by moving in and assuring children for example, that they can hang onto their trucks, that the teacher will not let Billy hit or bite. The teacher, of course, must make good the word; never should such a promise be made unless the teacher is reasonable sure it can be fulfilled. It might be added here that the enrollment of a child or children who have been observed or known to have severe behavior problems should be delayed until the other children, as a group, have become fairly well adapted to the program. Teachers can then make special plans for the child and can devote extra amounts of teacher time that would not have been available during the total group's adaptation period. With careful planning, a difficult child's entry into the group can be a constructive experience for all concerned.

Parent-Child Separation

Children often differ markedly in how long it takes them to adjust to the school program. Most children adjust fairly rapidly, within 2 or 3 days; an occasional child may take as long as two weeks. Generally speaking, if teachers have planned their program and their approaches to children well and if parents have displayed a confident and matter-of-fact attitude about leaving their child and have followed certain ground rules, most children adapt readily. Certain of the ground rules are so important that they will be singled out for special emphasis at this point. One has to do with saying goodbye to the child before leaving; the other has to do with having the parent tell the child specifically when he or she will return. An occasional parent, especially if there are problems associated with separation, may

suggest slipping out without telling the child that she or he is leaving. If a teacher allows this, it is, in a sense, condoning a kind of dishonesty. This could put a strain on the child's trust in the parent as well as in the teacher for the child may view the teacher as having been an accomplice in the parent's unannounced leaving. Therefore, the teacher helps the parent to understand that it is important to say goodbye and that the teacher will help the child ~~to~~ let the parent go. A first step is to give the child warning: "In a few minutes, your mother will be leaving." Then when the time comes, the parent should be coached to say good-bye directly but quickly and to state clearly in terms the child can understand exactly when the parent will return - "I will be back right after snack time." It is imperative that the parent return as promised. Unless the child can trust the parent's word about returning, the child may loose faith not only in the parent's word but also in the teacher who may have assured the child, perhaps several times during the course of the morning, that mother (or father) would return "right after snack."

Adaptation Problems

For the very few children and parents who exhibit severe separation problems, a special program needs to be worked out involving both child and parents. Separation by physically holding the child is never desirable; in rare situations, it may be the last remaining alternative. In such situations, great care must be exercised in planning the strategy. In all cases involving separation problems, it is of utmost importance that the child not be further burdened with the parents' and the teachers' concerns. Discussions about how to handle the situation should take place away from the child's presence both at school and at home; special efforts should be made by parents as they share their concern with each other or consult with family and friends, that the child not overhear such discussions.

Before concluding this discussion of arranging for children's initial adaptation to the program two special situations need to be discussed briefly. One has to do with taking a new child into the group during the course of the year,

a time when all of the other children are well adapted to each other and to the program itself. The same arrangements should be made for this child's adaptation as was made for the other children at the beginning of the school year. Teachers must remember to reinvoke all of the principles they used so successfully in the beginning of the year with all of the rest of the children - constantly giving the child feedback when doing the "right" thing; stating the rules clearly and holding to them firmly; using children's names, both the new child's name and the other children's names in many and varied activities; and most importantly, helping the new child find ways to make friends and join in play activities. Play groups and friendship groups, even among very young children, are often difficult for newcomers to penetrate. Teachers' assistance in one or several forms is almost always needed. Examples of ways to help the new child might be ~~helped by~~ setting up especially attractive activities that are sure to draw other children. The new child may perhaps play a key role (gas station attendant, complete with oil cans and tire pump). Another way is to select a potentially compatible child to work with the new child on certain preacademic tasks or in rhythmic activities (rowing together in Row, Row, Row Your Boat), or working side by side on a large mural or styrofoam sculpture. Usually, experienced children are pleased to assist in orienting the new child. The teacher's role, of course, is to subtly guide the process so that both the new and the experienced child benefit from the experience.

The other special adaptation situation that requires a special word is the child from a totally different culture, especially a non-English speaking child. With so many refugees entering our country, and an increasing number of exchange personnel programs in schools, industries, and professions, teachers will be working with such families at an increasing rate. For the majority of young children, learning a second, even a third language, poses few if any problems. In fact, Montessori recommended the teaching of other languages during the very early years.

However, there are a few children from societies very different from ours who do have a difficult time adapting, especially when their parents have little or no English. One way to help the family is to locate someone who speaks their language but is also facile with English. This person can help to explain preschool programs and the procedures. In large centers, with a great diversity of cultural backgrounds among the families, an alternate solution is to perhaps place the child in a classroom where there is another child from the same ethnic group. With situations such as this, it is far better to have a mis-match in ages and skill levels at the outset, if the language match can be made. Another recommendation is to let the parent move with the child through the various activities and routines during the child's early days in school. This helps both parents and child to gain some understanding of this strange new world they have been thrust into. In this arrangement the parents can feel more useful in helping their child to make the adjustment. Often parents with particular cultural mores view teacher as something akin to exalted; they often feel apologetic, even guilty about their child, whom they perceive as being a bother, giving the teachers "trouble" because the child is needing what may seem to the parent to be an undue amount of teachers' attention.

Summary

As stated at the outset, each child's initial adaptation to the program is an essential ingredient in the child's ultimate ability to make maximum use of the learning experiences that teachers make available each day. A well-planned initial visit where interest in coming back to school and a beginning rapport is established, followed by a carefully timed and individualized adaptation period over the first week or two of school enables most children to adapt readily to this new experience. Helping parents to be a part of this process, thus providing the child with some "known" elements in the new environment is another important component in the child's learning to accomodate to the school situation. Finally, making sure that the child comes to perceive the teacher

as the source of many "good" things as well as a source of consistently held limits allows a child to develop a sense of trust and security in this very new environment where there are expectations often quite different from those encountered before. The time and care that teachers put into the adaptation phase of the program is certain to pay off handsomely in terms of the children's eagerness and ease in embracing the learning arrangements that teachers will provide over the ensueing school year.